

Historic, Archive Document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FEDERAL EXTENSION SERVICE
Washington 25, D. C.

RURAL SOCIOLOGY, HEALTH, AND RECREATION

E. J. Niederfrank

What Do These Programs Include?

There is an upward swing of interest around the country in better living from better farming in better communities. More and more today one sees or hears of this theme in farm journal articles, in public addresses, in editorials, in the purposes of organizations, and in the preambles of programs and legislation.

Extension programs in rural sociology, health, and recreation serve to help Extension staff members and the people engage in sound, practical ways with the problems of better farming and better living which involve such things as leadership development, community organization, group processes, social changes, public services, and other health and recreation projects as indicated by the people.

A noticeable trend in these programs is that the persons engaged in them are more and more being called upon for counsel and assistance by staff members and other people to help them identify problems and plan programs of action to meet their felt needs with respect to these subjects. There is increasing interest among communities, counties, and organizations in doing things for themselves on the basis of their own analysis of situations and their own goals and hopes. This trend, in turn, is producing more and more teamwork among organizations, agencies, and localities, and greater demand for leadership development and effective organization for planning and conducting their own programs, with the assistance of the Extension Service and other agencies as appropriate.

In order to show more clearly what extension work in rural sociology, community development, health, and recreation includes, the major subareas with which the extension persons engaged in these programs are concerned, are outlined more specifically in the next sections, along with the extent of their development in the country as a whole. Although Extension programs in these subjects may vary considerably from State to State, depending upon State situations and personal factors, in general they currently include the following:

Rural sociology and community development

1. Strengthening community leadership -- principles and skills in making organizations and meetings effective, and in identification, training, and working with leaders.

2. Improving group processes and communication -- discussion methods, group phases of extension planning and teaching, improving participation in groups, techniques in analyzing facts, interpreting, learning, motivation, and communication processes for greater adoption of practices.
3. Community organization -- analysis and problem solving, organizing resources for action, improving community activities, suggestions for community projects, town-country relations, community approaches in setting up extension activities.
4. Social information -- helping provide and interpret facts on welfare programs and policies, population data, social trends, understanding county and community social structure in order to work more effectively with the people, community delineation.
5. Assistance in extension research studies and training.
6. Rural church and welfare -- liaison activities, relations between extension, and rural churches, church community problems, providing rural life information to church bodies.

Rural health, in cooperation with health subject resources

1. Improving health services and organization, including assistance in county or community health surveys and planning.
2. Helping people to know about local health resources and make better use of them.
3. Family health practices and facilities -- sanitation, other preventive practices, health insurance.
4. 4-H health planning and education -- assisting national health awards program.

Recreation and cultural arts, in cooperation with subject resources

1. Group social activities in organizations and meetings -- skills, values.
2. Home and family recreation -- wholesome use of leisure time.
3. Community recreation counseling -- planning, knowing, and using resources.
4. 4-H recreation -- assistance to national recreation awards program.

The basic objective of rural sociology and community development in extension is to achieve improvement in the social science understandings and skills of extension agents and community leaders, to help them achieve continued effective extension program planning and teaching, improved community organization and services, improved handling of human relations and welfare problems of rural

932591

people, and more and better rural leadership. A major task in accomplishing this objective is to teach and assist extension staff members and community leaders through the appropriate training and service activities, in order that they may function more effectively in their work with people and groups leading towards the basic objective. In essence, sociology in extension has a dual role:

- (a) to provide sociology training and service to other extension staff members for use in dealing with their own problems as extension workers.
- (b) to provide citizen training and service on community problems and programs through the county extension service.

The basic objective of the more specific health and recreation programs in extension is to achieve adequate health, welfare, and recreation services and practices as needed and desired by the people. The major task in this objective, primarily through agent and leader training, is to achieve on the part of extension workers and community leaders a greater appreciation of the worth of these programs and more skills and knowledge about them for helping families and communities to better living.

Various activities and services are conducted in States for the furtherance of programs in rural sociology, health, and recreation as developed by extension staff members and the people. Some of the typical activities and services are State and county staff training meetings and citizen training conferences on community organization and leadership; seminars for rural church leaders and clergymen, assisting with county or community studies and surveys, counseling with groups or persons on health, recreation, and other community problems of concern to them, teaching group methods and skills to local leaders, helping provide health and recreation education for home demonstration, 4-H, and other extension programs, helping build relationships and joint activities between various resources, extension programs, working and planning cooperatively with other agencies in order that these resources may best serve rural people and that the rural people may be best served by the resources, pertaining to their agriculture, family living, and community related problems.

Status of Programs

Every State and county extension program includes something in the nature of applied sociology, community organization, health, and recreation education. But the extent and quality of what is conducted and accomplished varies considerably, depending upon the amount of moral support and manpower devoted to these subjects. Some States include only a bare minimum of extension work in these fields, while other States have systematic projects with two or more full-time specialists.

The number of States having projects in these fields and the number of specialists are listed in the following tables, by years and by regions:

Programs	Number States		Number of specialists *		
	with projects	1946	1956	1946	1956
Rural sociology and community development	:	9	24	12	35
	:			:	
Health services and education	:	3	22	3	23
	:			:	
Recreation and cultural arts	:	7	18	12	23
	:			:	
States with one or more above projects .	:	15	38	27	81

* About 13 of these in rural sociology are less than full time, 9 of these in health, and 3 of these in recreation. The above figures also include vacancies and a few who are in a project of a different title.

Programs	West:	South:	North			Total States
			Central:	East:	North:	
Rural sociology and community development:	3	9	7	5	24	
	:	:	:	:	:	
Health	4	9	7	2	22	
	:	:	:	:	:	
Recreation and cultural arts	2	4	7	5	18	
	:	:	:	:	:	

The total number of specialists by title in the above fields actually budgeted for in the fiscal year 1956 was 71, equivalent of 60 man-years, and the amount of funds budgeted (all Smith-Lever) was \$485,900. This was about 2.2 percent of the total funds budgeted for all State extension specialists in the same year.

The first table indicates considerable growth in these programs. The number of projects and specialists has increased more than $2\frac{1}{2}$ times. Part of this reflects the growth in community development programs in the Southern States during recent years. Another part of the growth is in the increased health programs, which received major impetus after enactment of the Hill-Burton Hospital Survey and Construction Act of 1945.

There is still a long way to go in each of the three programs, especially in the Northeastern and Western regions. In addition to the need for programs in more States, there is also need for additional manpower in the already going programs of some States, if extension is to meet adequately the increasing demands for effective service to the people.

In addition to the foregoing figures, several States have considerable extension work in health and recreation carried on by other assigned staff members. Several States also draw heavily from time to time upon sociology research and teaching personnel, or on off-campus resources, for extension help in sociology. But these arrangements can provide only minimum, incidental assistance; they can never support adequate sustained programs in these fields as needed by extension staff members and the people.

Three basic factors are related to the extent and quality of rural sociology in State extension work. These are (1) the understanding and support of the director and other supervisors, (2) the presence of a department of rural sociology with strong supporting research and teaching programs, and (3) the specialist and his ability. When all these factors are contributing, effective programs of sociology in extension are usually easily developed.

Trends and Opportunities

Contributions to areas of new extension emphasis. Some parts of rural sociology, health, and recreation programs are especially pertinent in program projection, farm and home development, public affairs education, and work in low-income areas. Farm families are interested in health and recreation and in their own problems as leaders and participants in their communities, as well as in farm and home technology. The new expansion of watershed programs will need and want assistance in dealing with the sociological problems therein.

Extension workers will undoubtedly be hearing more expressions of all these interests as they become more involved in farm and home development, program projection, and in making all their extension work most effective. They will also be needing and wanting more social science skills and facts to help them work on these major areas effectively. Rural people will be wanting more help, too, as they think more broadly and deeply about their family plans and community concerns.

More health interest and advancements, also recreation. Rural people are more health-conscious than ever before, and they have more health resources available to them, as health facilities have been given much attention in past years. But now we also need to give more attention to teaching people about knowing and using what resources they have. Interest is high in the special problems of youth and of the increasing numbers of older people with their special concerns. Both of these areas of need are likely to be especially noticeable in rural communities. There is much greater interest in adequate recreation today than a generation ago, and this interest will further increase with declines in working hours and greater interest in problems of youth and retirement. Much interest is in evidence about the prevention and care of long-term illness, such as cancer, heart disease, polio, and mental illness, now that prominent childhood diseases have been brought under control. Scientific discoveries in health are on the upswing, and much is expected during the next 10 or 15 years. We have more active health and welfare agencies and programs than ever before, making use of the latest research findings and ideas. They are anxious, with the help of extension, to better serve rural people.

New researches in sociology which have application to extension program development, teaching, and administration are also now available or under way. These are contributing to the fund of sociology knowledge which is useful both in community development and in extension programs and methods.

Greatly increased interest around the country in community. There is especially more interest in community development programs and in community orientation in doing extension work. Special community-type programs are yielding helpful suggestions for more and better work. The community-improvement club-type program as a definite extension procedure has spread greatly in the South. Other projects in community development and in setting up extension programs on a community basis are found elsewhere, and extension agents need and want help along this line.

Various community issues are coming into the foreground -- suburbanization, new industries, rural zoning, junior college education in high schools, adult education in the community school, better roads and highway revision, forestry conservation, watershed organization, united community fund drives, town-country relations, and many others. Problems relating to seasonal and migratory labor are calling for more attention. Economic and population factors continually need to be considered in community analysis and in the planning of services and facilities.

More need to train and assist agents in applied sociology and psychology. Much progress has been made along this line in recent years as evidenced, for example, by the increased interest in the social aspects of communication and the special material on how farmers adopt new ideas. But training in family and community analysis and in better ways of involving people in programs, will be a continuing need and want on the part of extension workers. Involvement of other extension workers and other groups is more important than ever today because of the increased complexity of social organization in many areas and the multiplicity of programs and activities with which extension must be concerned.

In numerous States sociologists have been considerably involved in the newer areas of emphasis, especially in the evaluation and in agent training phases of them. It is becoming increasingly recognized that the sociology and psychology understandings and skills which staff members demonstrate, will contribute considerably to their success with program projection, farm and home unit work, watershed programs, and other new areas of work. Such matters as appraising present procedures, setting up or revising program-planning organization and procedures, appraising leadership possibilities throughout the county, planning how to initiate and develop programs, involving appropriate resources in an effective manner, forming new committees and handling planning meetings in order to produce the best results, are subjects that all extension agents face many times in their work.

Yet it is often in the social aspects of extension such as these that staff members meet their greatest difficulties. Almost every local extension project or activity involves at least some planning of leadership and organization, and usually a project's success will depend to a considerable extent upon how well this leadership and organization function.

Rural sociology, health, and recreation programs are better understood than ever before. The idea is increasingly accepted that a main function of sociology in extension is to contribute to the sociological aspects of all extension programs and problems, rather than being only a separate program of

activities for counties to parallel with other commodity programs. This trend has been enhanced by the tendency to separate sociology and recreation by name where they had been closely identified together, for each has its own specific features. However, there is increased need for more social science viewpoint and assistance in both recreation and health programs as they become more involved in their community aspects.

The quality of programs continues to improve. More research in sociology subjects related to extension work is now available than ever before and is being used. Extension sociology teachings are based on scientific concepts and practical skills that have been verified by experience and study. There has been much stress on agent and leader training in recreation, and on community health planning and organization, often in cooperation with other health agencies. Regular in-service training conferences or workshops for State personnel concerned with rural sociology, community development, health, and recreation in extension are needed for continued improvement in programs.

Cooperation and joint activity is an expanding factor in the improvement of programs. National 4-H program committees are active for both health and recreation, as well as in subjects related to sociology and community development. A national joint committee on public health between Federal and State extension and Federal and State public health has been established. The Northern Great Plains Health Committee has undertaken surveys and other activities which have stimulated both interest and action on various health problems in that region. Another example is our work with the President's Committee on Migratory Labor. Informal cooperation with various agencies and groups has been ever present and increasingly effective, both in the States and in regard to federal extension.

Cooperation of Federal Extension, not only with national health agencies and organizations, but also with church, recreation, and other welfare groups, has expanded in recent years. The fact is that Federal Extension has more liaison and cooperative activity with community welfare agencies than ever before. All this provides a stronger basis for similar cooperation and activities in States where Extension is already conducting or wishes to develop programs. Much is already going on along this line in States. It also results not only in better public relations for Extension but also better service to the people and more success in our traditional farm and home programs. Many worthwhile health objectives and other community goals can be successfully attained through cooperation with the many resources now available.

There are also closer relations and teamwork in sociology between research, resident teaching, and extension. This is enhanced, as well, as is the total development of rural sociology in the States, by the three regional committees on rural sociology which are now under way in cooperation with the Farm Foundation and the regional State director groups. These committees are in the Northeastern, North Central, and Southern regions. They are proving helpful and have considerable potential.

Three Conclusions Stand Out in Summary

1. The across-the-board application of rural sociology, community organization, health, and recreation programs to one another and to other areas of extension work.
 2. The large place in these programs for cooperative work with other agencies and programs beyond extension.
 3. The tremendous progress that has been made in these programs, both in the extent to which they are found in the States and in their quality. But there is still a long way to go -- still much to do.
-
-
-
-

